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Board of Internal Economy

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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons): I call to order the sixth meeting of the Board of Internal Economy of the 44th Parliament.

[*English*]

We'll start off with the minutes of the previous meeting.

Is everything okay, or do we have any comments on the minutes?

[*Translation*]

Everything seems okay, so I will continue.

[*English*]

Next is business arising from previous meetings.

[*Translation*]

Are there any questions?

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Holland.

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I've had a lot of conversations with the member for Ottawa Centre, who has been very strong on this point. Obviously, we also have a lot of concerns with the area immediately outside of this building on Wellington Street, and have had conversations about its future. I understand, or at least it's my understanding now, that Ottawa police will have Wellington blocked off until November.

I'm wondering if it would be appropriate for a report with respect to the future of the parliamentary precinct and Wellington and any other areas. Would that be coming to PROC? Would that be coming to BOIE? I just want to make sure there is a report forthcoming and to understand where that report will be coming.

In my view, it's absolutely essential that the area of Wellington Street in front of Parliament not be open to vehicular traffic that is not related to Parliament.

Hon. Anthony Rota: I'll let Monsieur Patrice answer that question.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): Yes, as you pointed out, there are many discussions, and in the public domain also, in terms of the future of Wellington.

It's something on which I hope we would come to this committee to give a report and have a discussion, potentially in camera.

Hon. Mark Holland: Thank you very much.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (whip of the Bloc Québécois): Mr. Speaker, the minutes refer to a lot of discussions on the issue of interpreters. As Chair, you have received letters from a union and documentation. This is under the business arising from the previous meeting.

Would you prefer that we deal with all of this under the third item, the one related to the Translation Bureau, or can we ask questions while we are dealing with business arising from the previous meeting?

Hon. Anthony Rota: I had intended for this to be discussed under the item related to the Translation Bureau.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Perfect.

Hon. Anthony Rota: However, if you wish to talk about it now, you may do so.

I feel it would be easier to keep all the subjects together that—

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: I agree that it would be easier to ask our questions when we talk about the Translation Bureau.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Perfect. Thank you.

We now move to the third item, “Translation Bureau – Resources Utilisation for Simultaneous Interpretation”.

[*English*]

Right now I'll hand it over to Lucie Séguin.

[*Translation*]

After that, Matthew Ball will have the floor.

I don't know if any others would like to present or if they are just going to answer questions.

At the last meeting, members had a lot of questions. So I'm wondering, would it be possible to limit question time to five or six minutes. I don't want to limit questions, but I want to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to ask questions.

[English]

Please be as concise as possible when you're asking your questions. Try to keep to five or six minutes. Then we'll let the next person go, loop around again, and start over, if that's okay. Again, I'll let everyone be their own police officer and control their timing.

• (1105)

[Translation]

We begin with Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, because I'm attending the meeting virtually, I cannot see my colleagues. Therefore, I don't know if other colleagues raised their hand before I did.

Can you please let me know if any of them would like to have the floor?

Hon. Anthony Rota: For now, you are the only one who wants to speak.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: All right.

I was asking because I want to give my speaking time to Mr. Julian. He didn't get to ask his questions at the last meeting, so I gave him the opportunity.

Basically, my questions are pretty simple.

Ms. Séguin, when you made your presentation, which was fascinating, we learned a lot about how the Translation Bureau works, what your responsibilities are, and what the responsibilities of the House Administration are. We had to end our meeting abruptly, and that's why you came back to testify today.

You stated that 14 incidents were identified in the House of Commons, but I believe you did not finish the breakdown into incident categories.

Can you tell us how many incidents were identified by interpreters working in committee rooms?

Ms. Lucie Séguin (Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau): Thank you very much.

First, I would like to inform the members of the Board of Internal Economy that my colleague Matthew Ball, vice-president of interpretation services, is joining us from Winnipeg. I would also like to take a quick moment to thank our interpreters in the booth today: Cecilia, Carol and Bryce.

I thank the member for her question. Things ended a little abruptly last time. We cited the number of incident reports that were filed with the Translation Bureau. I'd like to give you the breakdown by year.

In 2019, 23 incident reports were filed. In 2020, 125 were filed, and in 2021, there were 99. The number 14 was mentioned, so we checked the information concerning Parliament. By the way, I wish to remind the members of the Board of Internal Economy that the Translation Bureau provides services not only to the House and its committees, but also the Senate, the Canadian Parliamentary Press Gallery and the Cabinet, among others.

Of the 99 incidents reported in 2021, 73 involved Parliament, including the Parliamentary Precinct. Next, of the 125 incidents re-

ported in 2020, 110 were related to the clients I just mentioned, including the Senate, the Canadian Parliamentary Press Gallery and the Privy Council Office. In 2019, of 23 reports, 21 were related to Parliament.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: As you know, Ms. Séguin, our discussions are public and the interpreters' union is listening carefully to your comments. The Board of Internal Economy has no mandate to manage labour relations, far from it. However, we want to validate the figures we've received from the two unions representing the interpreters, be they Translation Bureau interpreters or other interpreters working within the House Administration, including freelancers, because we don't have the same breakdown. How can you explain that?

The tables that were sent to the chair and that we have all been copied on indicate that there have been 107 incidents in committee rooms. I imagine that includes both Senate and House of Commons committees. We know that there are fewer incidents in the House of Commons than in committee rooms.

Why don't you arrive at the number in the tables that were sent to the chair?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: Thank you very much for your question.

I'd like to say that since the pandemic began, we've been meeting regularly with our union partners at the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, or CAPE, the union that represents all translators, interpreters and terminologists at the Translation Bureau. We sit with them on a health and safety committee, so we all have access to the same incident reports. The data that I gave you are the raw data. I don't have access to the methodology used by our CAPE colleagues, who may have done a more in-depth analysis than we have.

As you know, today there are three interpreters in the booth here. We have about 50 interpreters on Parliament Hill, and with the pandemic, there are committee rooms all over the place. So I can't comment on the methodology that our colleagues at CAPE have used, but the raw data that I've provided you on the total number of incident reports should be consistent with those of our union partners because we actually share the same source of information.

• (1110)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, since I don't have an overview, are there other members who have raised their hands to speak?

I imagine my five minutes is up. Do you want me to stop? If not, I'll ask more questions.

Hon. Anthony Rota: With your permission, we'll go to Mr. Julian, and then to Mr. Brassard. You'll be able to continue afterwards.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Perfect.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

Mr. Peter Julian (House leader of the New Democratic Party): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Séguin, thank you for your presentation.

My first question has to do with workplace injuries. How many cases of auditory injury have been reported by the interpreters?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: Thank you very much for your question.

I'll turn to my colleague Matthew Ball, but first I can tell you that incident reports are filed by the employees and that the most common symptoms reported include headache, fatigue and tinnitus. The numbers I gave you are the number of incident reports.

There are currently no Translation Bureau interpreters on sick leave due to a sound-related incident. However, about 10 of our interpreters are interpreting part time and are assigned to other related duties because of medical recommendations that they should be given rest.

I can take pause and turn it over to my colleague Mr. Ball, if he has anything to add.

Mr. Matthew Ball (Vice-President, Services to Parliament and Interpretation Sector): Thank you, Ms. Séguin.

Our reports indicate three types of injuries. Disabling injuries refer to cases where the interpreter consults a doctor and obtains a medical certificate for one day or more of leave. There are also minor injuries.

Near misses is the third type. A near miss is when no medical care has been given and there has been no time off work. For example, if an interpreter goes home, has a headache and hears a ringing in the ears, it is called a near miss because there was no medical consultation.

Last year, in 2021, out of 99 injuries, 36 injuries were disabling and 63 were near misses. There were no minor injuries. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, thank you. It answers the question, but the numbers are different from the ones the union provided.

The union indicated that 68 injuries resulted in time off work. I would like to touch on that for a moment, because it's extremely important and I know you take it seriously as well.

Before I became an MP, I worked with deaf and hard-of-hearing people. During the recent occupation in Ottawa, an entire downtown population were exposed to a noise level that must have caused permanent injury.

It's the same thing here when we talk about injuries requiring interpreters to take sick leave to recuperate. Often, these injuries can cause permanent hearing loss. For that reason, I'd like to know whether the number of interpreters who have suffered permanent hearing loss is recorded.

In addition, do they undergo periodic hearing tests, as is usually done in workplaces with variable or high noise levels? Has that process already been put in place on Parliament Hill?

• (1115)

Ms. Lucie Séguin: Your question is very important. I'd first like to reiterate that the entire Translation Bureau management team is very concerned and aware of this issue. We are doing everything we can to protect the health and safety of interpreters.

A few studies have been undertaken by the bureau to help us understand the long-term effects of exposure to less than optimal noise. In the first, the National Research Council of Canada, or NRC, helped us conduct an analysis in collaboration with our colleagues in the House of Commons. This analysis concluded that interpreters are protected in terms of sound quantity, such as acoustic shock, but that there are still some noise quality issues that need to be addressed.

Just to add to that, because there is no evidence-based studies in Canada or internationally on long-term effects on hearing, we have invested in two other studies. I'll turn it over to Matthew to talk about what we're doing with the University of Geneva and the University of Ottawa to get more evidence on this.

Mr. Matthew Ball: Thank you, Ms. Séguin.

As the committee has just heard, we lack data and information on the effects of sound quality on interpreters' hearing. At the bureau's request, the NRC has already analyzed the sound quality that suitable for the interpreters' ears in the booth. The analysis revealed that the sound quantity was safe, but that the sound quality still needed to be improved.

The Translation Bureau is therefore finalizing a contract for audiologists from the University of Ottawa to conduct a longitudinal study of reference levels for interpreters' hearing, to follow up on time and to provide care in case of hearing damage. We are currently negotiating the terms of the contract and hope that the study can begin this spring.

Mr. Peter Julian: Is it a long-term study?

Mr. Matthew Ball: It's a two-year study.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

Another problem that has already been raised by the union is acoustic trauma. I understand what you're saying, but I think it would be important for the committee to hear from union representatives, to ensure that that we're on the same wavelength. Reducing acoustic trauma is extremely important, since it will help prevent injuries.

That said, I'm concerned about the number of injuries at work. We all know that the interpreters work hard and are essential to our work. I'm concerned about the number of injuries. I have enough experience to know that this can contribute to permanent injuries.

Some people have indicated that it's the sound system used by the interpreters that is causing these injuries. Do you agree with that? Are you looking for other ways of conveying the information so that interpreters can do their job without getting injured?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

I'd like to give some additional information on the previous point.

We immediately put measures in place to change the working conditions of interpreters, right from the start of work in virtual mode. We've reduced the hours of our employees and freelancers, without affecting their pay. We've also increased the number of interpreters per team. Finally, we've been working with the House Administration to ensure, among other things, that testing is done.

The Translation Bureau is responsible for providing interpreters, but it isn't responsible for the technological environment.

I believe my colleagues in the House Administration will be better able to answer questions about the technological means.

• (1120)

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

Thank you.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Julian, may I interrupt you for a second?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

Hon. Anthony Rota: I just want to remind you that other members want to ask questions. I didn't mean to interrupt you, but the time allotted to each speaker is roughly five minutes.

You can choose to let someone else speak or continue with your questions.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to ask one last question. I didn't mean to filibuster, but the health and safety of House employees are an important issue.

Did you recommend that the House Administration change the House audiovisual system? Is the House Administration looking at alternatives to the audiovisual system?

The union had said that this problem was the source of the workplace injuries.

Ms. Lucie Séguin: That's an excellent question.

We work constantly with the House Administration on everything relating to technical requirements. We want to protect the health of the interpreters, while ensuring that we provide a quality service and minimize interruptions.

We convey what the interpreters need to provide good interpretation services. We have a good understanding of the human aspect. As I mentioned, we communicate on a daily basis the current requirements that allow us to work in optimal technological conditions.

I'm not in a position to give you any answers as to what is within the system. So I'll ask the House Administration to answer those questions. In my opinion, they are in a better position to do so than I am.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Aubé, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Julian, following all the incidents that have occurred since the beginning of the pandemic, we've put in place a continuous improvement process with the Translation Bureau. You asked whether the problems that occurred were caused by the system. I would answer that this is not the case.

Several factors contribute to the sound incidents and poor sound quality. The audio system consists of several components such as the microphone, the computer, the quality of the Internet connection, the videoconferencing system and the system used internally in the House. We consider that all these elements to be part of the audio system, and we are working on each of them to improve the interpreters' working conditions.

However, replacing one part of the system isn't enough to solve the problem. This is a problem that exists around the world right now, and if there were a solution, we would have already implemented it, I can assure you, Mr. Julian.

We're working on all of these things to try to improve the situation, and it's constantly improving. I can tell you that it's because of these improvements that we've seen a reduction in the number of incidents involving interpreters over the past two years.

For example, in the first year we replaced all the interpreting consoles to ensure we put an end to incidents among interpreters. We're in the process of replacing the headsets with a microphone to improve the situation. We're evaluating the system to see how we can improve it and changing the configuration to improve the sound quality. We're constantly testing with the National Research Centre Canada and with global experts to ensure that our systems are performing at their best. I have to tell you that the systems we use to solve these problems are very good, if not the best in the world.

Hon. Anthony Rota: We're going to continue.

[*English*]

We'll go to Mr. Brassard, followed by Mr. MacKinnon.

[*Translation*]

Then we'll go to Mrs. DeBellefeuille, and Mr. Julian can ask more questions if he wants. I know this is a very important topic for everyone, and we want to give everyone a chance to ask questions.

Thank you for your co-operation.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin my line of questioning, on an unrelated matter, Mr. Julian brought up a claim of permanent hearing loss for residents of the city of Ottawa as a result of the recent protests. I'm just wondering—and I don't know whether this is normal—if Mr. Julian could table with this committee the reports that he's referencing and where that claim comes from. I haven't seen any and in order for us to make informed decisions around this place, I would like to see precisely where that report comes from.

Could you table that, Mr. Julian?

• (1125)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, I'm delighted to answer this question, because this is fundamentally important. Something that I think people often try to simply brush aside is the issue of permanent hearing loss that comes from excessive levels of noise that is unprotected—

Mr. John Brassard: Is there a report that justifies that?

Mr. Peter Julian: —and that's certainly what we saw over the last three weeks.

I'm answering your question, Mr. Brassard.

What we would need to do is see each of the individual residents of Ottawa who have gone in and seen their audiologist and those who have yet to see their audiologist to see the tracing of their hearing previous to the occupation and then post-occupation.

There is no doubt that the levels of sound reached over 100 decibels, sometimes as high as 120 decibels. That is enough to cause permanent hearing loss within minutes. To me, this is something that was profoundly disturbing, and it surprised me that certain members of Parliament didn't understand the importance of actually acting and that the hearing loss the people of Ottawa were experiencing was doubted.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you.

The claim was made, but there's no basis for the claim at this point anyway.

Hon. Anthony Rota: If I can interrupt—

Mr. Peter Julian: Quite the contrary, Mr. Brassard, quite the contrary.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Order. If I can have your attention, please, we have some people who are being very patient with us here—

Mr. John Brassard: All right. I do have questions for the interpreter.

Hon. Anthony Rota: —so maybe we can take this and have a separate item altogether.

Mr. John Brassard: I would love that.

Hon. Anthony Rota: That might be something we want to look at, but right now, Madame Séguin and Matthew Ball are here to answer our questions. We'll concentrate on them and then come back to this one. We can have our own discussions later.

Mr. Brassard, please continue.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, sir.

My question relates to parliamentary functions of interpreters and the function as it relates to the cabinet and the Prime Minister. We've obviously seen the parliamentary functions, and we understand where that comes from, whether it's through committee work or work in the House, but there's also when the cabinet and the Prime Minister have their press conference on almost a daily basis as it relates to COVID and other issues.

Can you differentiate between the number of injuries related to the parliamentary function and the function of the cabinet and the Prime Minister? Is there a way to quantify how that's played out?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: That's a very good question, Mr. Brassard.

Right now we are looking at the number of incidents and those that occur in the parliamentary precinct. We have not done the analysis to determine where each incident is occurring. We're working actively with our House administration partners as well as our other clients to put in place a rigorous monitoring process to understand where incidents are happening and what the sources of the issues are, and then to put corrective measures in place immediately.

I would say that interpreters are reporting incidents from all over the place right now, including in conference interpretation for departments and agencies as well as the Supreme Court of Canada and the CRTC. We don't have a breakdown of where incidents are happening right now.

Mr. John Brassard: Can you speak, then, to the differences between the services provided to parliamentary resources and those provided to the cabinet and Prime Minister? My understanding is that there is a difference between the two. Is that correct?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: The interpreters of the Translation Bureau are able to offer their services to all types of clients, whether those be in the precinct, the Privy Council Office or government departments or agencies.

I would say that the type of event is different. Right now we're having a meeting with a hybrid setting. Currently, most of our meetings have a hybrid setting component, but our interpreters are always performing their work on site. From that perspective, it is the same.

Participants in meetings have different, I would say, levels of adherence to our recommended practices. The wearing of headsets and making sure that people have a very stable Internet connection tends to vary depending on where a meeting is occurring.

• (1130)

Mr. John Brassard: When do you expect the data collection distinguishing where these injuries are occurring to be complete? When will you be able to provide the committee with any information to show that distinguishing line with respect to what's happening with the parliamentary resources and what's happening with the Prime Minister and the cabinet?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: If this is something that is requested of us, we could—

Mr. John Brassard: I'm interested in hearing about that. Thank you.

The other—

Hon. Anthony Rota: If I could interrupt, I believe Monsieur Patrice would like to add something on that. Maybe he has more of the technical side of it.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Through you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Brassard, your question is very relevant to us. While the pool of interpreters is offering the service to the cabinet, Privy Council and the press conferences of the Prime Minister, from a technical standpoint it's not the House that's providing that service to cabinet and the press conferences and so on. It's a different system altogether. Those incidents would not be related, for example, to the technical system that the House uses.

Mr. John Brassard: Through you, Chair, to Mr. Patrice, if the system is not similar, does that mean that the risk of injury would be greater? We've applied a pretty consistent system within our parliamentary resources. Is there anything being used outside of those parliamentary resources, such as in the example that you gave, that would cause the interpreters to be at any greater risk?

Mr. Michel Patrice: I could not comment necessarily on the system that the Privy Council, press conferences or cabinet uses. Maybe Stéphan has more information about that.

Obviously our greatest concern is the health and safety of our interpreters. That's why we continually improve, but we can only improve the system for which we have overall responsibility. For us, the details you are asking for with respect to the incidents and the nature of the incidents are very germane to our ability to try to find a solution and fix the problem.

Mr. John Brassard: I'm sorry, Mr. Aubé. Do you have anything to add?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: All I can say, Mr. Brassard, through you, Mr. Speaker, is that at the beginning of the pandemic, most of the press conferences weren't using the same technology as the participants are using. You saw a larger rate of incidents happening at that stage.

We are working to provide advice and solutions in order to minimize the risk. We don't want the interpreters to be sick because they're participating in other types of events. We are providing guidance in that fashion, sir, in order to limit them.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Chair, I do have one more question, and then I'll cede the floor. I may come back to others as well.

An unsafe workplace complaint has been launched against the Translation Bureau because of interpretation arrangements. Can you speak to that just to provide the committee with some insight as to the basis of the complaint?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: What I can say about that, Mr. Brassard, is that we are aware that there is a complaint that has been filed. It will be assigned to health and safety professionals.

I want to remind everyone that we're making every effort to mitigate the risks while we are trying to find solutions actively with our House administration partners and other clients, and we are fully co-operating while the complaint resolution process gets under way. That really is the extent to which I can comment.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Now we'll go to Mr. MacKinnon.

[*Translation*]

He will be followed by Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

[*English*]

Then we'll go to Mr. Julian, and then back to Mr. Brassard.

Oh, we have Mr. Calkins after Mr. MacKinnon.

Go ahead, Mr. MacKinnon.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Chief Government Whip): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is obviously a concern for us, as it involves injuries. Occupational health and safety are non-negotiable.

What was the workplace injury frequency for interpreters before technologies we use today, such as Zoom, were implemented?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: Thank you, Mr. MacKinnon.

I provided a breakdown of incident reports filed by interpreters as of 2019. There were 23 total incidents in 2019, four incidents in 2018, 10 incidents in 2017 and five incidents in 2016.

● (1135)

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: So there seems to be a strong correlation with the arrival and the use of technology for House and committee meetings.

Ms. Lucie Séguin: Yes, definitely. We can say that, since remote meetings began, where interpretation services are required for participants who are not all attending in person, an increase in incident reports has been noted.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: I would like to put a question to you for my information, but don't hesitate to let me know if you think it should rather be addressed to Mr. Aubé.

As parliamentarians, we sometimes spend entire days on Zoom, not only as part of our duties in the House and in committee, but in other circumstances, as well. I don't think that, like us, our interpreter friends are using \$2.50 headphones or even headsets like the ones provided and tested by the House.

I don't want to complain about anything, but isn't it true that we are exposing ourselves to the same risks as the interpreters, whether we are talking about compressed audio or other factors that constitute a hearing hazard?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: That is a very good question. People often talk about the “Zoom effect”. That is exactly what we are trying to understand. As the employer of the largest number of interpreters in Canada, the Translation Bureau team is trying to answer those questions.

Unfortunately, there have been no conclusive studies on the impact of exposure to poor sound quality. We are familiar with problems related to the amount of sound. I don't want to use too many technical terms, but I can tell you that, what has helped us a lot and has also helped our colleagues from the House administration, was the study by the National Research Council of Canada, the NRC. That study included specific tests and involved acoustical engineers and audiologists. That is currently an emerging field.

We are still looking for partners, be it in Canada or abroad, to help us fund more studies, but that is exactly what we are trying to understand right now.

This is purely speculative, but I could tell you that, yes, technically, everyone who uses technology to participate in meetings is exposed to risks. However, I can tell you that the NRC study indicates that interpreters in the booth don't have access to the same sound quality as participants in virtual meetings, who have a much better sound quality than our interpreters in booths because of the devices in place to protect interpreters' hearing. That is our understanding of the NRC study.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: If I have understood correctly, the equipment for protecting our interpreters contributes to the risk of injury. Is that right?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: To avoid acoustic bursts, we regulate the amount of sound that goes into the interpreter's ear. That said, the process is much more complex than that. I don't claim to be an expert in acoustical engineering, but I know that a host of other factors must be taken into account. When the sound goes through computers, through the Internet, it is subjected to very sophisticated processing. There is a lot of manipulation that enables the sound to go from my mouth to my microphone, and then to the interpreter's year.

I think that my colleagues from the House would be in a better position than me to talk about the technological environment. Acoustical experts also help us understand this entire phenomenon.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Aubé, do you want to add anything on this?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Mr. MacKinnon, according to the data from our analyses, sound is different depending on whether it is coming from the Internet to the room or from the room to the Internet.

Does this lead to a difference in quality? Does the perceived difference have an impact on people's hearing? I cannot answer this, but we have definitely determined that there is a difference between the two.

The work we are currently doing with world experts, experts on sound quality, consists in improving elements that will help us have a similar quality on both sides. That is what we are currently trying to do.

• (1140)

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Which risks interpreters face differ from the risks faced by people using similar technology throughout the whole day? We may be talking about technology related to interpretation or not, of course. What are the risks for people who participate in Zoom meetings or hybrid meetings?

This is clearly a major societal issue if the risks are the same. I have no doubt that the House administration and the Translation Bureau have worked hard to buy the right equipment, to carry out the best possible research and to decrease the risks to interpreters.

In theory, the average person who uses Zoom to participate in a meeting is exposed to the same risks, but the situation is not quite the same.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: May I add something, Mr. Chair?

Hon. Anthony Rota: Yes, Mr. Aubé.

I will then give the floor to the next questioner, so that everyone can ask questions.

Go ahead, Mr. Aubé.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Mr. Chair, I will raise only a few elements.

The interpreter's role is clearly completely different from the role of those listening to them. The cognitive aspect requires a much greater effort from interpreters than from those participating in the meeting who are only listening to what is being said. A connection can be established between sound and this, but it is different.

We must analyze various elements, and that is what we are currently doing, with the help of experts. That is actually what Ms. Séguin has asked experts who are doing research in this area. She wanted to understand why interpreters are feeling it more than others. She also wanted to understand the connection between the two.

All those participating in the committee's meeting are currently hearing the same thing. The sound is the same for the interpreters. However, the interpreters who are listening to Mrs. DeBellefeuille, whose sound is coming from outside the room, seem to perceive a difference in terms of sound quality. When Mrs. DeBellefeuille is listening to Mr. Ball, the sound seems to be better. Those are the current perceptions. We are studying them to try to understand where that difference comes from.

We have implemented certain things to protect interpreters' hearing. But we currently don't know where their fatigue and headaches are coming from. Ms. Séguin and her team are working with experts. We, on our end, are working on our audio systems to continue to improve the situation, to make the sound steady across the two platforms.

That is where we are at right now. You said this was a societal issue, but the problem is global; it is not a problem we are experiencing only in the House or in Parliament.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Exactly.

[English]

Hon. Anthony Rota: We'll continue with Mr. Calkins, followed by Madame DeBellefeuille and Mr. Julian, and then we'll go back to Mr. Brassard.

Go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Chair.

Following up on the line of questioning I had the last time we had this conversation, just as a quick reminder, Madame Séguin, the rate of injury prior to going to a hybrid or virtual Parliament was significantly less than it is after we adopted the virtual and hybrid Parliament. Is that correct?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Could you give us a reminder? Could you remind us of what the ratio is? Is it five times as many injuries? Is it 10 times as many injuries?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: Would you like me to respond right now?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Yes, please.

Ms. Lucie Séguin: Okay, no problem.

With regard to the rate of reported incidents, there is a distinction to be made between reporting an incident and an injury. This is exactly what we're trying to determine.

In terms of reported incidents, yes, they have gone up. As I said before, in 2017 there were 10 reported incidents. In 2018 there were four. In 2019 there were 23. Then it goes to 125 in 2020 and 99 in 2021.

• (1145)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay.

Mr. Aubé, the equipment that's sitting in front of me right now is the equipment that was sitting here in 2017. The device that I'm listening to is the same as in 2017. The issue isn't the actual technology within the confines of the House of Commons, because the technology doesn't appear to have changed at all.

I know I'm stating the obvious when I say we have a requirement for a virtual Parliament. I'm not questioning whether those things needed to happen or not; we all agreed to them. It seems to me it's the inability to control things, as you've said, over the Internet, whether it's feedback or whether it's the quality of the bandwidth or the connection. In your opinion—and you've done the best you can to get the best equipment possible for everybody involved—there are still so many wild cards involved that this is as good as it's going to get going forward if we continue to maintain a hybrid Parliament or a virtual Parliament.

Is that a fair statement? Would you agree with my statement?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: I would agree, Mr. Calkins, that there are multiple variables that we can't control, such as the Internet, to your point, and they do have an effect on the audio quality when people are coming in, but I would also say we're striving, sir, to continuously make improvements in order to mitigate these.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: The issue we have is not necessarily with members who have devices that are provided to them to participate virtually, whether it's in the House of Commons, at committees or

elsewhere, but it is noticeable that sometimes the equipment of participants or witnesses who are asked to appear before committees might not be at the same standard as the equipment that's provided to members of the House. Is that correct?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: That is a correct statement, sir.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Is it a cost issue that we can't get these witnesses the right equipment? Is it a time constraint? What is preventing us from having a standard that witnesses are able to meet?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Ian, do you want to answer?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Ian, yes, if you have the answer.

Mr. Ian McDonald (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Legislative Services Directorate, House of Commons): Sure. Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, there are some of those variables. It's not, generally speaking, a cost issue. We have a process whereby we automatically issue approved headsets to any witnesses who are appearing before committee. We get them out as soon as the clerks are advised that someone is going to be appearing before our committee. Generally speaking, it takes two days to get a headset to someone anywhere in Canada. It's a pretty efficient process, but sometimes witnesses are asked to appear at the last minute. There are other considerations as well. Those are all variables that come into it.

We don't provide other equipment, in terms of computers and their Internet connections and stuff. It's—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: We're blessed, as members, to have a tech-savvy department backing us up. Witnesses might not have that same level of tech savviness supporting them. That's all understandable. Is that correct?

Mr. Ian McDonald: If I may—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Yes.

Mr. Ian McDonald: —we do offer quite a bit of support, though. Stéphan's team, the IT ambassadors, do pretest the onboarding of witnesses—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Ian McDonald: —to make sure they are able to participate. We do that in advance of the meeting, and then at the meeting we do our best to make sure that everything goes smoothly.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: My last question is for both Mr. Aubé and Ms. Séguin.

If we were to do away with, as soon as possible.... I think we're slated to go until June 23, unless we change our minds to do it sooner. The best way to ensure the safety and security of the people who are employed here at the House, particularly our interpreters, who seem to be shrinking pool of talent, would be to resume the normal practice and go back to a normal Parliament and forgo the video conferencing and teleconferencing that we're currently relying on heavily.

Would both of you agree with that statement?

Ms. Lucie Séguin: If I may, through the Speaker, the working conditions are much preferable in person right now in terms of both quality of sound and quantity of sound, for sure. In terms of ensuring the health and safety of interpreters as well as minimizing interruptions and maintaining the quality of the service, as things stand right now, when meetings occur in person, we have a better chance of—

• (1150)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Well, obviously; I mean, the numbers support that 100%, right?

Mr. Aubé, do you agree?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Yes, definitely, Mr. Calkins. As more participants take part in person, you should see a reduction. I wouldn't want to say that we have to remove it all, because you'll always have a case of a witness who has to participate remotely—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Even prior to COVID, sir, if I may, we did have teleconferencing and sometimes video conferencing, but they weren't primary. They were a secondary use, when it was just not possible for witnesses to travel or they were from New Zealand or some other place like that.

I'm not suggesting that those things should not happen anymore; it's just to not rely on those as a primary mode of appearing before the House or a committee.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Recognizing the existing technologies that are out there, sir, it's a fair statement that you'll see a reduction. The more that participants appear in person, the more the reduction you'll see in incidents. You should see that, sir.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Well, I would hope that everybody here at this board would take that under advisement. It looks like we have no choice but to do what's right for our interpreters and return as quickly as possible to a non-hybrid parliamentary session.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good. Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

To all of the people who've asked questions, thank you for sticking to about five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille will now take the floor, followed by Mr. Julian.

[*English*]

Then we will go to Mr. Brassard.

No? You're good? Okay.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be pretty quick, as a number of the aspects I wanted to cover have been raised by my colleague, the whip of the official opposition.

At the Board of Internal Economy, we have dedicated a lot of time to analyzing this issue and to worrying about our interpreters' fate. As you know, interpreters are essential to the proper operation of our democracy and to our participation, as parliamentarians, in the House of Commons and its committees. Sincerely, interpreters are indispensable, especially to unilingual members, be they franco-phones or anglophones.

I am adding my voice to the voice of my colleague from the official opposition. We will soon have decisions to make on whether to continue with or stop parliamentary work in a hybrid format. It should be pointed out that the pandemic has had a number of victims. In Parliament, the victims who have suffered permanent collateral damage are our interpreters. They have been going through hard times, and I think the figures are conclusive on this.

So I encourage my colleagues to take this into account in their discussions. As whip of the Bloc Québécois, I know that members of all parties like the hybrid model, but we have to remember that it was put in place temporarily to enable us to meet during the exceptional situation caused by the pandemic. The plan was for it to come to an end.

In a few minutes, we will probably have an opportunity to discuss our plan for reopening the parliamentary precinct. This reminds us that all the parties in the House of Commons will have to make decisions over the coming weeks. We must never forget everything we learned today. If we continue to sit in a hybrid format, the short-term situation will not be improved by studies whose conclusions will be known in two years or technological efforts by the IT team, and the number of accidents will continue to increase. Normally, work would have to be redone.

I am adding my voice to that of my colleague to say that, once we have to make decisions, we mustn't forget the following: if someone expresses the desire for Parliament to continue its work in hybrid format, that will send the interpreters a message that their health is of little importance to us.

In closing, Mr. Chair, rest assured that the health and safety of interpreters, who are very dear to us, will always be at the heart of the Bloc Québécois' concerns.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Ms. Séguin and Mr. Aubé, would you like to comment?

You are signalling that you would not.

Mr. Julian will now take the floor. And then I think we will be done.

Mr. Julian, go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have always seen the Board of Internal Economy as a non-partisan forum, where we are not repeating debates we have already held in the House and where we should always focus on the House administration and the best way to apply the decisions made by the House of Commons. So I disagree with certain comments, which seem more appropriate in the House than at the Board of Internal Economy, which is non-partisan.

That said, could you confirm that a study has indeed been carried out by the National Research Council of Canada on the issue of interpreters and sound quality in the House of Commons?

• (1155)

Ms. Lucie Séguin: Yes, the Translation Bureau did contract the NRC's services for a study on the amount and quality of sound, which we discussed a bit. That study was done with the full cooperation of House administration employees. The board is actually responsible for the health and safety of individuals, but it was important for us to involve partners in charge of technological infrastructure.

Mr. Ball could perhaps provide more details on this important study.

Mr. Matthew Ball: We did contract the NRC to assess the quality and amount of sound reaching the interpreters in the facilities of the House.

Concerning the amount of sound, the report indicates that interpreters are indeed protected by the installed safety devices. The simultaneous interpretation consoles, which were replaced by the House of Commons, control in half a second any sound that exceeds 84 decibels. So the NRC confirmed that interpreters were protected when it comes to the amount of sound.

As for sound quality, it is different than it would be in person. As was said earlier, this is due to sound processing, its transformation and its compression by filters and the Internet. We want to better understand the impact of that sound processing on interpreters' health and hearing. We don't know that yet.

Mr. Peter Julian: Could we get a copy of that report?

Mr. Matthew Ball: Yes. I think it was previously sent to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Mr. Peter Julian: Could we get a copy for the Board of Internal Economy?

Hon. Anthony Rota: The report is in the binder.

Mr. Peter Julian: It's not in mine.

Hon. Anthony Rota: We will make sure to get a copy to you.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much.

Unless I am mistaken, one of the study's recommendations was along the lines of what I said earlier, that the audiovisual system must be improved. Is that right?

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Aubé, could you answer this question?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Julian, the report states that NRC has observed the sound differences between the internal system and the external system. It seems that the report blames the internal system. However, from the administration side, we haven't been able to achieve the same results, even with other parties. We're pursuing our efforts. We've had several discussions with them to try to understand their findings.

The report contains some measurable and accepted observations. However, other observations haven't yet been accepted by the administration or confirmed by our independent tests.

• (1200)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm reading from the report, which says:

This demonstrates that the AV system, in its present set-up configuration, used for ZOOM videoconferencing in the Committee Room 425 is non-ISO 20109 compliant.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: I would agree with that, sir. I would say that right now in the virtual world, in the virtual elements, we have not seen a system yet that can integrate with any of the systems that we use right now that would be ISO compliant.

That is a fair statement. The goal is to have a quality of audio that is similar to that, recognizing what's possible right now. We believe that what we are achieving is very close to that, but it is not to ISO standards. You can't say that all of the elements of the supply chain are ISO compliant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we should also invite the union to one of the upcoming Board of Internal Economy meetings.

All my questions have been answered. However, I'm still a little concerned that the information from the union differs somewhat from the information provided here. I think that it would be good to clarify things with the union at one of the upcoming Board of Internal Economy meetings.

Thank you.

Hon. Anthony Rota: We'll move on to the next item on the agenda.

It's the letter that we received from the International Association of Conference Interpreters and that you can find in our binder. It invites us to come here or to submit a document.

I would like to suggest that we ask for a document. That way, the information provided can prepare us for a visit if we deem it necessary.

[English]

What I'd like to do is ask that the AIIC submit the submission that they talked of—

Mr. Michel Patrice: And the union.

Hon. Anthony Rota: —and the union. I'm sorry. We'll get that from ACEP as well. With that extra information, we can see where we go from there. I think that would be a fair way to proceed.

From what I'm hearing and from what I'm feeling, I don't think there's any question that we want what's best for our interpreters. We don't want their health to go down a road that is going to hurt them or be something that they'll regret later in life. With that extra information, hopefully, we'll be able to answer some questions and improve their conditions.

Thank you to both Ms. Séguin and Mr. Ball for appearing.

Now we'll go on to the fourth item, which is the quarterly financial report for the third quarter of 2021. Monsieur St. George and Madame Valiquette will be presenting.

I'm sorry. I thanked our visitors, but I didn't thank our technical people, Mr. McDonald and Monsieur Aubé, for being with us. You've been very helpful. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. St George, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul St George (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm here today to present the quarterly financial report for the quarter that ended on December 31, 2021.

Quarterly financial reports compare the year-to-date financial information of the current fiscal year with the year-to-date financial information of the same quarter of the previous fiscal year.

This unaudited report is prepared by the administration using modified cash accounting. I attest that the information in this report is accurate and reliable.

The \$561.4 million in annual approved authorities for the 2021-22 fiscal year amounts to an increase of \$22.5 million, mainly for security support enhancements for members and for the information technology systems and facility assets relating to the long-term vision and plan.

As of December 31, 2021, the House had spent \$366.8 million. This amounts to an increase of \$22.6 million compared to the previous year.

• (1205)

[English]

As shown on the slide, in terms of the member remuneration category, the increase is mainly due to approximately \$3.1 million for members' severance benefits and approximately \$2.5 million for increased travel following the gradual easing of public health restrictions.

As for the House administration category, the increase is mainly due to a retroactive additional amount that is estimated at about \$11.7 million for economic increases. This retroactivity goes back three years. In addition, the administration continues to incur costs to adapt to the needs of members in virtual House proceedings and committees as well as for telework by the administration employees.

By the third quarter of this year, the House is reporting a budget utilization rate of 65.3%, which represents a slight increase of 1.4% compared to the prior year.

With that said, I want to report to the board that these results are on track with what was approved, and besides what was identified in the report, there are no other material financial variances or concerns to bring to your attention.

The specifics of the report and the variances can be found within your quarterly report package.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes my presentation. I welcome any questions the board might have.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any questions?

Go ahead, Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As we quickly approach the end of the fiscal year, some of the carry-forward provisions and the exercises that have taken place in the past, I assume, will take place this time.

I understand that the House administration has some priority files. Could you indicate to the board what some of those priority files might be?

Mr. Paul St George: Thank you for the question, Monsieur Brassard.

In terms of our carry-forward, we do expect to carry forward this year and we do a forecasting for the entire fiscal year. In terms of carry-forward files that we have had in the past, I would welcome Elaine Valiquette to provide some of the specifics for those files.

Mr. John Brassard: If I may, just to be clear, what specific projects do you have in mind for this year as well?

Mr. Paul St George: This fiscal year our focus is on COVID-19, obviously, and the increased costs we're seeing for the House administration, as well as various other projects that we have in play.

Ms. Elaine Valiquette (Senior Director, Financial Planning, Resource Management, House of Commons): We're in the middle of doing our strategic planning exercise for the upcoming fiscal year. Projects are being submitted for funding out of the House administration portion of the carry-forward, and those decisions have not yet been made.

I don't know if there is....

Mr. Paul St George: In terms of the projects that Elaine is referring to, we do have some larger ones in play. For example, we have one called CAMP, which is looking at how we manage assets within the House of Commons. That is a project that's been in place for, I think, two years, and it will continue for another three years. That would, of course, be funded through the excess carry-overs from year over year.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you.

Mr. Paul St George: You're welcome.

Mr. John Brassard: You've also noted in the report \$1.7 million of spending this year as it relates to the pandemic. I know that in some of the past reports you've indicated that redeployment of employees from their usual employment to pandemic-related work has occurred. Do you have a sense right now of how many House employees have recently been deployed to pandemic-related responsibilities?

Mr. Paul St George: I don't have the specifics with me. I'd be happy, though, to investigate further and provide that information to the BOIE.

Mr. John Brassard: I would like that. Thank you.

My final question relates to page 4 of the report, which speaks about the fact that House administration is monitoring the impact of the recent protests on House finances. What are some of the impacts you believe you're going to see?

Mr. Paul St George: That is a very good question.

In terms of the impact, it is very immaterial to date. It was more on the resource side in order to ensure that the precinct was secured, essentially. However, at this time it will probably not show up in the results because of materiality.

• (1210)

Mr. John Brassard: You expect that most of that will be in relation to parliamentary security, then?

Mr. Paul St George: That is correct, yes.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other questions for Monsieur St George?

Then we'll move on to item number five, I believe.

Monsieur St George, I'll let you continue.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul St George: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm here today to seek guidance from the board on certain temporary policies implemented to help members address the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These policies are set to expire on March 31, 2022.

These temporary policies increase the advertising spending limit from 10% to 20% of the budget. Members may include in their advertising and printed material certain messages and solicitations for certain donations related to COVID-19. Members may include the cost of Internet services for teleworking employees in their budget.

Mr. Speaker, you'll also find in your handout a letter from a member of the board asking the board to consider making permanent the increase in the advertising limit to 20% of the member's office budget.

The House administration has conducted a preliminary review of member spending trends since the implementation of the temporary policy to increase the advertising limit. As of January 31, 2022, 3% of members had exceeded the standard 10% limit. This percentage was 13% at the end of the previous fiscal year.

Pursuant to a board decision in December 2015, the member's office budget is increased each year based on the adjusted consumer price index. As a result, the purchasing power for advertising increases proportionately.

On April 1, the member's office budget will increase by 3.7%, with the cumulative increase over the past five years totalling 8.9%. This reflects an average increase of \$3,531 per member in purchasing power for advertising.

[English]

The administration is suggesting that the board maintain the increased advertising limit, that is, until the end of June 2022, while the administration reviews the implications of setting it permanently.

Should the board decide to discontinue the increased limit when the administration presents its findings before the end of June, it will suggest alternatives that will minimize the impacts on members, considering that they may have already committed to spending plans for the entire fiscal year.

With regard to the reimbursement of net costs of Internet services incurred by member employees, 25% of members have made use of the temporary policy. There have been fewer Internet reimbursements this year compared to those of the prior year, when 35% of members submitted claims. As this policy impacts member employees who are teleworking, we are also suggesting and recommending that this policy be extended until the end of June 2022 and that the administration also return to the board with a recommended approach for the future.

In summary, the administration is recommending, first of all, that all three policies be extended until the end of June, and second, that the administration be provided with a mandate to assess the potential impacts of any further extensions or any change to these policies.

Mr. Chair, that concludes my presentation. Once again, I welcome any questions you may have.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any questions or comments?

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that the House administration is open to changing the advertising spending limit. There have been changes in advertising practices.

Members can now promote their services on all social media or through print media. We can post our services, telephone numbers and contact information in a variety of new places so that everyone can reach us as quickly as possible.

However, I still have some concerns about the administration's recommendation. Personally, I always plan my media placements. Like any good administrator or manager, we budget for the period from April 1 to March 31.

Your proposal seems like an odd practice for managers who must run everything responsibly. I don't really know what kind of commitments or arrangements you could propose if we were to commit more than our 10% at the start of the fiscal year.

I'm asking for the support of the board members. I think that we're prepared to change the advertising spending limit from 10% to 20%.

I want to tell the people tuning in that this doesn't affect our budgets. We aren't asking for an additional budget. We're asking for some flexibility, depending on our territory or province, that would help us use good management and adapt to our world.

I stand by my first request, which is a permanent increase in the advertising spending limit from 10% to 20%.

Since I'm participating in the meeting virtually, I can't interpret the body language of my colleagues. If my colleagues don't want to do this, could we at least ensure that the pilot project continues until March 31 rather than June? I think that ending the pilot project in June is a bad idea for managers who want to plan all their activities and media placements as of April 1.

• (1215)

[English]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Calkins, we will go to you next.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Chair.

I have some questions in regard to how things line up with the recommendations and the policies that have been implemented tangentially, and how they are meant to serve each other. Notwithstanding the issue that Madame DeBellefeuille is bringing forward—I have some thoughts on that—the part that I want to look at is part C: “The reimbursement of reasonable high-speed Internet service costs for Members’ employees who are working from home in support of parliamentary functions, as a charge to the [member's operating budget].”

I guess this is what I'm curious to try to find out. I'm unclear as to whether or not the vaccine mandate policy, insofar as it pertains to not only the House, which seems to have somewhat different rules on masking and so on from the rest of the precinct....

Why would we not link the high-speed Internet service costs for staff who can't access the precinct with the policy that forces them not to access the precinct?

[Translation]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. St George, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Paul St George: As we go through the analysis, that may be a recommendation that we come back to the board with. At this time, we're looking at the three policies together, because they were adopted together, but they may have to be carved out and looked at individually.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Michel, did you want to speak to that?

Mr. Michel Patrice: I just wanted to mention that the policy with respect to the reimbursement of high-speed Internet predates the vaccine mandate. It was at the beginning of the pandemic, when it was recommended that everybody stay home.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Right, but that's now morphed into a mandate.

Mr. Michel Patrice: The policy—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: The employee's pass is disabled from accessing the precinct if they haven't provided proof of vaccination. Am I missing something?

Mr. Michel Patrice: No. You're right about that other aspect of it, but I'm saying that the policy—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I understand. The policies were not related at the start, but now, because of the imposition of mandates, they're intertwined. That's my point.

Mr. Michel Patrice: There may be a relationship, but that's not the reason for us to be before the board.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I understand.

The other question I have is this: How do you enforce having an increased amount for your budget for a quarter of a year over the annual reporting that members are required to report? How are you going to manage the ability of a member to spend something in the first quarter when their only requirement is to be within budget at the end of four quarters?

• (1220)

Mr. Paul St George: When we come back with those options, we'll be bringing to the table various formulas. One that you could look at, for example, is a pro rata of the first three months and the last nine months, and that becomes an average moving forward. As Ms. DeBellefeuille said, another option is also just continuing for the remainder of the year.

We will bring two or three options for consideration. Be certain that whatever we bring forward will mitigate or manage that planning process.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: As my last comment, I'll go back to the proposal by Ms. DeBellefeuille to make the 20% increase on advertising permanent. Does she foresee or expect changes, or would she like to see changes made, in what can be advertised vis-à-vis party logos and other things, as part of our advertising policy? Are there other things she wants changed, other than the amount, or is it just the amount?

[Translation]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mrs. DeBellefeuille, this question is for you.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, should I answer it?

Hon. Anthony Rota: The discussion concerns your proposal. I wanted to wait until everyone had finished asking their questions. However, some of the questions are about your two proposals. The floor is yours.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To answer my colleague's question, my proposed rule change concerns only the percentage. The current rule is sufficient and it meets our needs. I would just like to see the advertising percentage increased from 10% to 20%, since this doesn't affect our total budgets.

The exceptions allowed during the pandemic should likely be repealed, since the reopening process has begun in earnest throughout the provinces. In particular, there's talk of stopping the use of masks in Ontario and Quebec. These measures were adapted to the pandemic.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I'll make two suggestions that we can discuss before making a decision. I can see that the House administration isn't suggesting that we make a decision.

Since the fiscal year ends on March 31, I'm proposing that the advertising percentage be increased from 10% to 20% effective April 1 and that the \$500 limit per event be increased. I'll let my colleagues propose the amount of this increase. Personally, I would suggest that the current amount of \$500 be increased to a maximum of \$1,000. However, I would be more than willing to negotiate this.

I don't want a big discussion about rewriting the rules. I just want to ensure that we have some breathing room and a little more flexibility as we manage our upcoming advertising budget.

Hon. Anthony Rota: That's fine. Are there any comments?

[*English*]

Mr. Brassard has a comment or a question.

Mr. John Brassard: I have. Thank you. It's in regard to the resources that are currently being provided by the House. We saw this increase in the budget because everything had shut down, including those resources.

Have we seen a significant uptake as a result of these resources now being provided? Are we seeing less advertising coming out of the members' budgets because they've now referred back to the House for their printing and advertising needs? Do you have any data that supports that, or have you seen anything with regard to that?

Mr. Paul St George: At this time, we haven't gone into that depth of analysis comparing this year to prepandemic, or even through the pandemic until now. That's what we're proposing to do over the next three months.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay.

I took advantage of the advertising opportunities, and I know that many of my colleagues did, and the increase in budget, but I have seen myself pull back into the resources that have been provided by the House without using some of the external sources that we were using at the beginning of the pandemic. I expect you'll probably see an increase in the use of the resources that are currently being pro-

vided by the House, resources that weren't there at the beginning of the pandemic, which was the reason for this increase, as you are aware.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1225)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Seeing no other questions, I guess we have three options now. We have two that were offered by Madame DeBellefeuille and one that was offered by Mr. St George, the recommendation that we have in our package.

How do we want to start this? Do we want to start with the new proposals and then work our way back, or do we want to start with the recommendation that was made initially?

Is that a yes, Mr. Julian?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Okay. We'll start with the recommendation that was made by Mr. St George.

Do we have acceptance of this recommendation?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille is opposed to this proposal. We don't have unanimous consent.

We'll move on to the next proposal, which is Mrs. DeBellefeuille's proposal.

[*English*]

That's to extend to March 29, 2023.

[*Translation*]

Does this work for everyone?

Mr. Julian, do you want to add anything?

Mr. Peter Julian: I didn't really understand Mrs. DeBellefeuille's proposal. Does she want all these components to end by March 29?

Hon. Anthony Rota: She wants this measure to continue until March 29, 2023, instead of ending in June, because that's in the middle of a fiscal year.

Is that right, Mrs. DeBellefeuille? I want to make sure that I'm providing the correct information.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: The administration's recommendation had several components, and I disagreed with them. I actually agreed with some components, but disagreed with others.

I want to know whether the Speaker and all members agree that, from April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023, the advertising spending limit should be increased from 10% to 20%.

I'm willing to make that compromise so that the House can conduct its analysis during the year. By April 1, 2023, we can decide whether to change the rule permanently or go back to the old rule. That's my first proposal.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Do we agree with Mrs. DeBellefeuille's proposal?

Mr. Peter Julian: No.

Hon. Anthony Rota: No?

Mr. Peter Julian: However, I would agree if her proposal were added to the proposal made earlier. If this advertising component were adopted in addition to the extension of all policies until June 30, I would agree with both these measures. However, I wouldn't agree with the adoption of this advertising proposal unless we were to adopt the other components suggested by the House administration.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: I don't understand, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Me neither.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, I'll let you explain your proposal again so that we understand exactly what you mean. I gather that the suggestion was accepted and that it would apply until March 29. Is that right?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, except that I wouldn't agree with her proposal unless the other measures were extended until June 30, except for the advertising measure, which would end earlier because of the fiscal year. I would agree with the adoption of these two measures together, but not with the adoption of one without the other.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Okay.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I'll make a proposal.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Go ahead, because you'll do it better than I could.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: The House administration's proposal contains several components. One component relates to my request to increase the advertising spending limit from 10% to 20% of the budget. I would have liked this change to be permanent. However, I'm willing to accept the extension of the limit for consideration until March 31, 2023.

I also agree that the Internet fee measures and the other measures in the proposal should continue until June. Basically, the change concerns the advertising spending measure.

I think that Mr. Julian meant that he would support my proposal if I phrased it that way.

• (1230)

Mr. Peter Julian: You're right, Mrs. DeBellefeuille. Thank you.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Do we agree with this?

Since I don't hear any objections, the decision is made.

For the next item, the committee will continue in camera.

I'll suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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